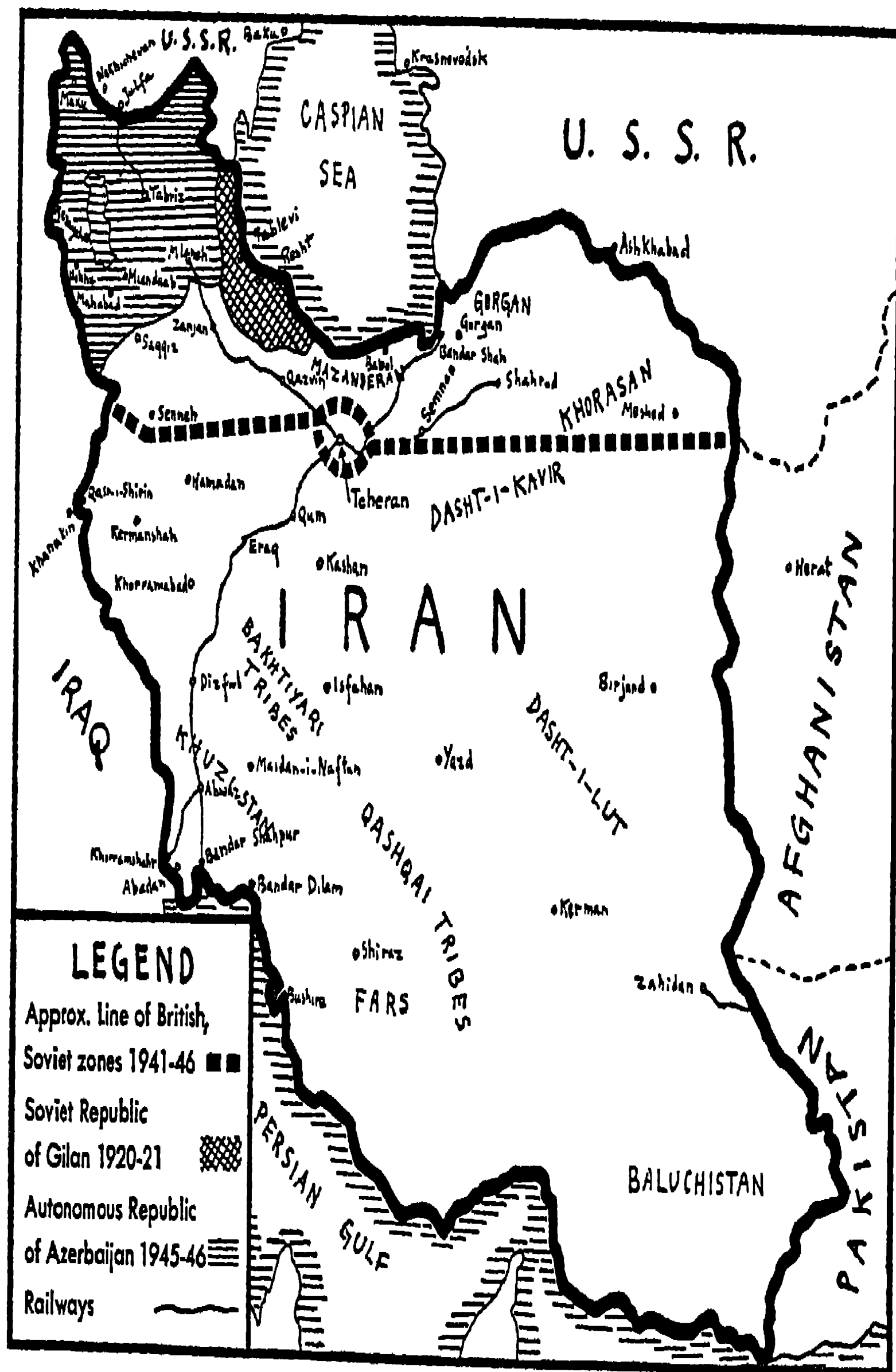


RUSSIA AND THE WEST IN IRAN, 1918-1948



Map of Iran.



RUSSIA *and the* WEST
IN IRAN, 1918-1948
A Study in Big-Power Rivalry



BY GEORGE LENCZOWSKI

Hamilton College

Cornell University Press

ITHACA, NEW YORK, 1949

Copyright 1949 by Cornell University

Cornell University Press

London: Geoffrey Cumberlege

Oxford University Press

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA BY THE
VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC., BINGHAMTON, NEW YORK

TO MY WIFE

Foreword

IT would be foolish to pretend that Big-Power rivalry no longer exists in Iran. However, the major problem in Iran today, as everywhere else in the world, results from rivalry between two different ideologies, not from conflicting national interests. One of those ideologies, supported by Soviet Russia, promises the hungry peasants and workers of Iran a Utopia under Communism. The other, supported by the United States and other Western Powers, offers an opportunity for gradual improvement under democracy. While democracy offers continued respect for individual liberty, which Iranians enjoy today to a very considerable degree, the Soviet spokesmen speak of "true democracy" in a classless society without landlords.

The common man in Iran is bewildered by these conflicting appeals. Which will prove more persuasive to him is not yet certain. The principal ally of the democratic forces in Iran is the Soviets themselves, whose heavy-handed methods and threats of force to achieve purely Russian ends have deprived their propaganda of much of its effectiveness. Moreover, if the Soviets had been more successful in bringing Utopia to the U.S.S.R. during the past thirty years, their appeal to Iranians would carry more weight.

The principal ally of the Soviets in Iran is poverty, disease, and an ineffective governmental structure in Teheran. The people of Iran have suffered through several generations of Great-Power rivalry, often at the expense of the Iranians. The experience has left a deep mark on their social and political thinking. As a consequence, it is natural that many Iranians today consider the present situation in their country to be merely a continuation of Iran's experiences during the past century, with Washington vs. Moscow substituted for London vs. St. Petersburg as the chief protagonists. Many students of the Iranian scene fall into the same error.

FOREWORD

A study such as Mr. Lenczowski's is valuable in order to permit students of present-day conditions in Iran to understand not only the background out of which these conditions have emerged, but also the difference between the present situation and what has happened in the past. His volume contains convincing evidence that the problem in Iran today is strikingly different from the problems of previous generations.

The United States has no territorial or imperialistic interests in Iran. Its only desire is to assist Iran to become strong enough to maintain its independence and integrity against anyone who might have imperialistic aims there. We desire to see Iran develop industrially and stand on its own feet. This is the very opposite of imperialism.

The contrast between American and Soviet foreign policy in Iran during the past few years has been sharp and clear. The Soviet Union has frequently, since the end of World War II, used force and threats of force in an effort to obtain commercial and other concessions in Iran. The American government has lent assistance to Iran without exacting any concessions or promises in return. We have taken no steps except at the request of the Iranian government, and have at all times made it clear that we had no desire to press American military or other advisers, or material assistance, on Iran or any other country unless the recipient showed clear desire to receive our help.

There are those who will contend that I have oversimplified the picture and that American policy in Iran has not been as altruistic as I have claimed. My reply is that my statement is based on personal experience in executing that policy and is as honest as I can make it.

Imperialism, or colonialism, is an effort by a Great Power to keep another country weak and dependent—politically, militarily, and industrially. The good neighbor is a nation that tries to help another country become strong and independent—politically, militarily, and industrially.

Let those who would understand Iran today study its background, but let them not conclude that the rivalry in Iran today is between Big Powers. The rivalry is between big ideas.

GEORGE V. ALLEN

*Assistant Secretary of State,
formerly United States Ambassador to Iran*

Preface

THE purpose of this book is to acquaint the reader with Big-Power rivalry in Iran between 1918 and 1948. While there are many valuable studies that deal exhaustively with the diplomatic history of Iran up to 1918, the literature dealing with the subsequent period is much less abundant. To the author's knowledge, there is no single book devoted exclusively to the study of modern political developments in Iran. Works that have appeared since 1920 are mostly of a general descriptive character and deal with such diverse aspects as Iranian geography, climate, people, culture, and economics. They seldom devote more than one or two chapters to international relations.

These thirty years between 1918 and 1948 constitute a very stormy period and are characterized by two outstanding features that make them unique in Iran's long history. One is the emergence of Reza Khan, who on becoming absolute ruler of Iran adopted radical measures to Westernize his country. The other is the clash of the Big Powers for influence. And while this rivalry is not a new phenomenon in itself, its character is new because it is colored by profound ideological differences.

In this study the author's intention has been to concentrate on political matters, with special stress on the external relations of Iran with foreign powers. Thus internal developments are treated only insofar as they have bearing upon international relations.

The conflict between Soviet Russia and the West is the essence of this study. The author has attempted to describe and analyze, on the one hand, the program and techniques of Soviet expansion, which constitute a novelty in the traditional pattern of diplomacy, and, on the other, the methods employed by the West to counteract this expansion.

PREFACE

The author derived his information from four main sources. These were the original documents, such as treaties, Comintern publications, and memoirs; the existing literature covering various aspects of the period here investigated; the press, both Iranian and Western; and personal observations made during the author's three-year stay in Iran in the crucial period between 1942 and 1945.

The book is addressed to the general reader, but with an eye to the specialist in the area. The author's sojourn in Iran convinced him of the necessity of supplying foreign service officers and industrial, commercial, or military representatives whose interests may link them to Iran with a body of political information that is not available elsewhere within the framework of a single volume.

The structure of the book has been adapted to the author's view of the period under description. To use literary analogy, this period resembles a drama in three acts. Act One presents the first clash between the new dynamic Communist State and the opposing forces in an Eastern country, jealous of its independence. The attempt to extend Communism to this area fails. Act Two provides a lull after the storm. Violent operations give way to undercover activity under the pretense of calm on the surface. In Act Three the storm returns with greater force than before. All the experience that the Soviet State has gained during the preceding two acts is utilized to secure success. But the resistance that the Communist offensive encounters is also stronger. At the time when this book is written it looks as if Act Three had ended with the victory of anti-Communist forces. Such a victory, however, can never be definite as long as there is a center from which Communism radiates and as long as the opposition is apt to make mistakes. That is why Act Three, though concluding this study, does not conclude the course of history, and may be followed by the flow and ebb of action and inaction.

If there is any moral in this book, it is the same as that derived from the study of international affairs in general—namely, that an understanding of the past serves as a guide to the future.

I wish to express my thanks to Mr. Thomas B. Rudd, President of Hamilton College, 1947–1949; to Mr. David T. Wilder and Miss Helen Gaffney, Librarian and Reference Librarian of Hamilton

PREFACE

College; to Professor Edgar B. Graves, head of the Department of History at Hamilton; to Professor C. Grove Haines, of the School of Advanced International Studies; to Mr. Kalixt Synakowski, of the Harvard Graduate School; and to Mrs. Theodore R. Bowie for their friendly helpfulness during the preparation of this book. I wish also to express my gratitude to Professor T. Cuyler Young of Princeton University for his transliteration of Iranian names as well as for the valuable information he has given me on the crisis of August, 1941, and the events in Tabriz, December 5-12, 1945. Last and not least I wish to acknowledge the tireless work of my wife in reading and translating a number of original and microfilmed documents in Russian.

GEORGE LENCZOWSKI

Hamilton College

April, 1949

Contents

FOREWORD, by George V. Allen vii

PREFACE ix

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION 1

Prologue: The Making of the Colonial Revolution 6

Iran in Communist Strategy and Tactics 9

Chapter Two

COMMUNISM, NATIONALISM, AND IMPERIALISM
IN CAUCASIA AND CENTRAL ASIA 12

The Emancipation of Transcaucasia 13

The British Expedition to Baku 16

The Freedom and Doom of Three Republics 22

Revolution and Nationalism in Central Asia 26

The End of Khiva and Bukhara 29

British Intervention in Turkestan 31

Iran's Place in British Political Doctrines: British Withdrawal 41

Chapter Three

THE FIRST SOVIET EXPERIMENT IN IRAN 48

Kuchik Khan's Rebellion 54

Azerbaijan Separatism and the Khorasan Episode 60

The Rothstein Mission 65

Chapter Four

A PERIOD OF ARMED TRUCE 70

Foreign Advisers and Bahrein 74

The Story of Oil 76

CONTENTS

The Northern Oil Imbroglia	81
The Soviet Attitude toward Reza Shah	86
Soviet-Iranian Economic Relations	91
The Communist Party of Iran	97
Comintern and G.P.U. in Iran	108

Chapter Five

A THEORETICAL INTERLUDE: BLUEPRINT FOR COLONIAL REVOLUTION	119
The Doctrine	119
Organization of Oriental Revolution	126
The Sixth Congress of the Comintern	129
Application of the Theses to Iran	138
The Seventh Congress of the Comintern	141

Chapter Six

THE GROWTH OF GERMAN INFLUENCE IN IRAN	145
Before and during World War I	145
German Influence in Iran after World War I	151
The German Fifth Column in Iran	162

Chapter Seven

IRAN'S POLICIES DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR	167
Foreign Relations	167
The Aftermath of Dictatorship	177
The Role of the Majlis in Wartime	179
The Political Parties	185
The Press	187

Chapter Eight

SOVIET POLICY IN IRAN IN WARTIME	193
Conditions in the Soviet Zone of Occupation	194
Soviet Propaganda: Its Organization	199
The Censorship	206
Soviet Propaganda: Its Substance	211
The Oil Crisis of 1944	216
A Trojan Horse: The Tudeh Party	223

CONTENTS

Chapter Nine

ELEMENTS OF OPPOSITION TO SOVIET SCHEMES	235
Native Conservatism and Nationalism	235
Seyyid Zia ed-Din	242
The Tribes	247
British Policies in Iran during the War	254

Chapter Ten

THE AMERICAN ROLE AND AMERICAN ATTITUDES IN WARTIME	263
American Advisers	263
The American Army in Iran	273
The Problem of American Propaganda	276
The Dilemma of Basic American Policy	279

Chapter Eleven

THE AFTERMATH OF THE WAR: IRAN IN WORLD POLITICS	284
The Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan	286
International Aspects of the Soviet-Iranian Dispute	292
Negotiations and Agreement with Azerbaijan	300
The British Reaction	304
The Emergence of American Leadership	306
APPENDICES	317
INDEX	377

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

THE modern history of Iran is largely a history of Big-Power rivalry. Owing to this fact, Iran during the past century and a half has often appeared to be a pawn of international diplomacy. In the great struggle for influence in Iran two forces seem to have been permanent throughout the nineteenth and a good part of the twentieth century, namely, Russia and Britain. Other great Powers appeared like meteors, outshone temporarily the brightness of two constant stars, but soon faded into oblivion. Such was the case of Napoleonic France in the beginning of the nineteenth century and of Imperial Germany one hundred years later.

The ancient Empire of Iran entered modern world politics around 1800 when Napoleon undertook gigantic schemes to destroy England. Convinced that England's doom must be preceded by French domination of the East, Bonaparte launched a hazardous adventure in Egypt and planned the conquest of India. His negotiations with Tsar Paul of Russia in 1801 ended in a scheme of joint invasion of India by French and Russian forces, the former to traverse the Black and Azov seas, the Don and Volga rivers, and the Caspian Sea and to march through Iran. The plan was only partially carried out. Tsar Paul gave orders to Ataman Orlov to lead a Cossack expedition through the Turkoman steppe. The expedition, because of inadequate preparations, proved a failure, and the subsequent death of the Tsar put an end to the scheme. Napoleon's grand strategy, however, still envisaged Iran as an important factor. He tried to establish a military alliance with the Shah as an instrument of his anti-British or anti-Russian policy. The Franco-Iranian Treaty of Finkenstein in 1807 was the apogee of French influence in Iran. A mission headed

by General Gardanne was sent to train Iranian troops for action. Yet in 1807 Napoleon destroyed the edifice of friendship he had built by concluding the Treaty of Tilsit with Russia. The Shah felt offended and betrayed. In 1809 he expelled Gardanne and was ready to receive a British mission, which offered him an alliance.

With the passing of French influence, Iran remained face to face with her two neighbors, Russia and Britain (through British-controlled India), who proved to be permanent factors in Iran's foreign relations. Of these two, Russia has constantly been on the offensive. Aspiring to gain access to warm-water ports, Russia was jealous of Britain's position in India and displayed unsatiated territorial and economic ambitions. Her relationship to Iran was one of steady pressure and advance at the expense of her southern neighbor. As far back as 1724 Peter the Great raided and temporarily occupied Iran's northern province of Gilan.

Beginning with the reign of Catherine the Great, Russian pressure increased. Russia fought aggressive wars with Iran in 1796 and 1800-1813; the later one was concluded by the Treaty of Gulistan. A new war was waged in 1826-1828. These wars resulted in the gradual loss by Iran of her rich Caucasian provinces. Mingrelia, Karabagh, Shirvan, Derbent, Baku, Erivan, and Nakhichevan were one by one annexed by Russia. The Treaty of Turkomanchai of 1828 crowned this victorious advance by establishing the frontier on the Aras River south of the Caucasus range and by subjecting Iran to the political and economic supremacy of Russia. By a clever arrangement Russia assumed the role of protector of the ruling Qajar dynasty and as a result secured the obedient servility of weak and degenerate Iranian monarchs.

The Treaty of Turkomanchai triumphantly closed one chapter of Russian expansion, but it did not exhaust it. The second chapter began with the occupation of the island of Ashur-Ada in the Bay of Astarabad in 1837. It was characterized by a gradual movement on the part of Russia to dominate Central Asia, and it was executed partly at the expense of Iran. In 1869 a Russian military expedition occupied Krasnovodsk on the eastern shore of the Caspian. The city was nominally under Iranian suzerainty, but protests from Teheran were of no avail. In 1873 another Russian expedition conquered the